

Brotherhood

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Summary: OneShot Three marines stationed aboard the Athens, bonded by brotherhood, fight against the Covenant boarders to discover the sad truth.

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Brotherhood

The paper target shredded to small pieces of confetti under the concentrated blasts of lead projectiles from the professionally wielded MA5B Assault Rifle. Private Andrew Strand side stepped two paces and quickly turned his body ninety degrees only to unleash hell onto yet another moving paper target. A loud bell sounded just as the final scraps of paper settled onto the floor.

Smoke still streaming out of his weapon, Pvt. Strand looked behind him with a proud grin towards the windowed observation bay. His two colleagues playfully taunted him through the thick glass and mimicked expressions of anger and frustration. Andrew was the last of the three to begin the shooting exercise and had easily won.

"Hey, where's my fifty dollars?" Andrew yelled out loud. Due to the loud ringing in his ears, his shout sounded much, much quieter to him than it actually was.

The door to the observation chamber opened silently and the two fellow marines walked out laughing from a joke they had just made under the hearing of Andrew. One name patch read in thick black letters, Private Emmanuel Bates and the other read Private Henry Jones.

Henry, still laughing, shouted aloud, "Andrew, you bastard, I saw you fire a few rounds before the starting bell sounded."

"That's right you cheater. Lucky for you, we'll let you try again later and you'll see who the real marksman is!" Emmanuel chimed in.

Andrew slung the assault rifle back into the supply rack and nodded over to the two approaching men. "Yeah right, I fired early. You two morons emptied half your clip before the bell rang." He walked over to his friends. "I'll make a deal with you, we'll do this again and if I win, double or nothing."

"Double or nothing? How about we promise not to kick your skinny little ass?" Henry playfully shoved Andrew on the shoulder.

Andrew straightened himself up to project his full six foot two inch height. "Bring it on buddy, except I'm running over to the mail station first. The November issue of playboy was just released and my copy should be in."

Upon the news, Emmanuel shouted out loud, "I got dibs on the Erica holograms!"

Both Andrew and Henry faced him and openly protested, "Yeah screw you!" They all raced out of the firing range towards the mail station.

The three marines had grown up together in a small rural community in northern Montana. Their fathers were avid hunters and took each of their sons out with them on their weekly hunting excursions. Looking back at their childhood, each marine seemed to be born with a rifle in their hands. As they grew up, they began to hunt on their own. Nothing escaped from their sights alive. Deer, pheasant, and even the occasional fox all fell to their superior marksmanship. Regardless of the weather, rain, snow, sleet, or hail, they always went out to hunt each Sunday morning and never came home empty handed.

Coincidentally, they were all born on the same day, July 11th. Upon their eighteenth birthday, each young man was drafted into the UNSC Marine Corps to fight in the war against the Covenant. As young children, they heard stories of the outer colonies fall to a mysterious and powerful foe. As teenagers, they heard rumors of inner colonies falling to the might of the Covenant. Despite all of the ONI propaganda, they always seemed to know that when the time came, they'd join the fight against humanity's greatest foe.

Drafted at the same time, the three young men were sent to the same training base in far off Virginia. They slept in the same bunker, trained in the same fox hole, and pressed their backs together as they fought off would-be enemies.

Their Staff Sergeant quickly recognized the bond that the three new privates held and trained them very hard in teamwork and tactical cooperation. Thanks to their unreal marksmanship and unwavering brotherhood, there wasn't a single challenge created by the Sergeant that they couldn't surmount.

Flying through basic training far ahead of the other trainees, the three newly ranked privates were sent aboard the UNSC Defense Station Athens. Neither of them had ever been to space. It was to be a

whole new adventure and the feelings of invulnerability flowed with them. The television, radio, and paper all proclaimed the new stations as the backbone of the new drive to defeat the Covenant. Supposedly nothing could break through the new defensive lines and the three friends heartily believed it.

As the three marines raced towards the mail station, sirens suddenly captured and smote the playful and energetic feelings around them. The numerous display banners running down from the ceilings pictured red warnings of an impending attack.

Through the speakers, the tactical commander's voice rang out. "Covenant boarding parties en route. Report to battle stations."

The voice repeated several times, but the three only needed to hear it once. They stopped in their tracks and ran back towards their rally point.

"Shit man, my baby Erica is going to have to wait!" Emmanuel lamented.

"Shut it buddy, she's mine first of all, my subscription, my hologram. Second, don't make me talk while I'm running," Andrew quickly commented sucking in large gasps of air.

Suddenly, Henry stopped and grabbed Emmanuel on his marine shirt. "Andrew, we'll catch up with you! I found something that might be useful!"

Andrew didn't have a chance to complain. After making eye contact with him, Henry dragged Emmanuel down another hallway and they quickly disappeared from sight. Andrew took in another deep breath and pushed on towards the rally point.

After a few more minutes of running, Andrew finally made it to his rally point. A Lieutenant tossed a ceramic flack jacket and helmet at him and loudly complained, "It's about time you got here, dammit. Those Covenant shits are all over us. Now where the hell are your two buddies?"

The young marine quickly threw on the equipment and grabbed a battle rifle off of the armament rack. Andrew snapped a quick salute to the officer and quickly replied, "Sir, they're right behind me."

The Lieutenant sighed. "Look, we don't have time to wait. I'm going ahead with the rest of the platoon to pelican bay Charlie. When those other two make it, you're to bust your skinny little ass over with the rest of us. Understood?"

"Yes, Sir!"

The officer ran ahead with several marines behind him. The room quickly became void of any life except for the nagging warning sirens echoing throughout the defense station.

Andrew nervously checked to make sure that the rifle was loaded and counted the extra clips of ammo on his belt. He looked back and was relieved to see Henry and Emmanuel quickly catching up with him. Their footsteps rang loudly on the metal floor and their deep breathing was uncharacteristic of them. However, Andrew soon noticed

that each of them toted along a bulky M274 machine gun.

"Where the hell did you two get those things!" he exclaimed.

Henry was breathing heavily and didn't answer except for crack a grin and nod.

Andrew knew what he meant instantly. "Common, the Lieutenant wants us to report over to the pelican bay for support."

"Sure, let me just catch my breath and â€¦" Emmanuel was cut off by the sounds of weapons fire and tortured screams of marines from the pelican bay.

The sounds of battle raged on for several minutes and the three listened carefully. Andrew could have sworn he heard the dying yell of what must have been an elite but the shouts and screams of marines were far numerous.

Then, as suddenly as it came, it ended and the only sound was once again the dull blaring of the sirens.

"Shit man, do you suppose â€¦" Henry started.

"Yeah â€¦ Ok, look, set up those two guns facing straight down the hallway. If the boarders come out of the pelican bay, they'll have no choice but to either run back in or towards us. We're going to catch them in the middle and blast them into that shit we used to feed my dog." Andrew hurriedly stated.

Emmanuel and Henry didn't disagree and they quickly set up the guns on the floor. Moving behind an information desk, the two marines sat and hid. Andrew crouched behind the metal staircase below his friends and trained his scope on the hallway.

There they sat, breathing quickly, adrenaline rushing through their veins, waiting for the enemy to come. Sure enough, the figure of a grunt appeared from around the corner, far down the hallway. It looked carefully at the mounted machine guns but assumed no threat realizing that they were not armed with soldiers. It waved towards the pelican bay and quickly waddled towards the three nervous marines. Following a few meters behind, several more grunts appeared and two large elites, one blue and one red.

Andrew waited for them to come closer. He was concealed very well, laying down underneath the stairs. It would take a miracle for the approaching enemy to see him.

By the time they reaching the midway mark, he opened fire. His first several bursts of fire found homes into the skulls of the nearest grunts. Three bursts of his rifle saw the explosion of three heads.

Hearing their friend open fire, Henry and Emmanuel leapt from their hiding position and began firing the two machine guns. Although the accurate battle rifle fire from Andrew was quickly decimating the forward grunts, the .30 caliber rounds from the machine guns hastily made quick work of the rest.

The last enemies to stand were the two elites. The red armored one

recognized the doom they faced and tried to run back towards safety. Brave and ignorant, the blue elite managed to fire a few bursts of his plasma rifle harmlessly into the metal shielding protecting the two gunners before the hail of bullets ripped through his shielding and flesh alike. Almost around the corner, the red elite sensed bullets tearing at his rear shielding. He reached forward towards the corner of the hallway and was almost there when one of the heavy bullets snuck through the weakened shielding and punched into the back of his head. The elite's eyes went black as he fell forwards into a bloody oblivion.

The rage of the two machine guns stopped suddenly and all three marines anxiously sat, unmoving, anticipating another attack. None came.

"Common, lets move out," Andrew shouted as he crawled out from under the stairwell.

Henry looked at his ammo box and cursed loudly. "Shit! I'm almost out ammo, looks like we're going to have to go on with the classic battle rifle."

The wall armaments were heavily laden with battle rifles and the two marines picked up one each while Andrew nosily dropped his empty cartridge and loaded another. He gestured with his arm and jogged forwards with his rifle tightly poised on his shoulder.

The three marines approached the corner of the hallway and stopped. Andrew quickly poked his head around and nodded. Emmanuel and Henry leapt forward and pointed their rifles into the pelican bay. No living thing remained in the empty chamber. On the floor lay numerous burnt and bloodied marine bodies and on the far end, bullet ridden grunts and an elite lay oozing dark blood.

Proceeding into the chamber, Andrew quickly found the Lieutenant. He had been very unlucky and his body was riddled with plasma burns. From his facial expressions, he had died a painful death.

Emmanuel's voice suddenly sounded. "Um, guys, what the hell are these marks?"

Quickly walking over, Henry and Andrew looked down at the base directly underneath the Covenant boarding craft and noticed several sharp engravings leading from the floor towards the only other exit. Henry was the first to reply.

"Shit man, I don't know. Looks like something sharp was dragged that way, but that leads to the MAC firing controls. Why the hell would they bring anything there?"

"Hell if I know man. Lets go check it out," Andrew stated staring down at the marks. He raised his head and looked at the Malta through the windows. "I sure hope they're doing alright over there, too."

Andrew turned around and ran over to Henry and Emmanuel who'd already started walking out of the pelican bay. Just as the doors shut behind him, the pelican bay was flooded with the bright glow of the Malta as the Covenant antimatter bomb tore it apart.

The three marines cautiously followed the marks on the ground through several rooms, inching closer and closer to the MAC firing chamber. The last set of doors opened up revealing a small elevator. The motion sensors picked up the approaching marines and the doorway opened seconds later. The cuts in the ground continued into the elevator.

The three marines walked into the elevator and punched in the command to take them to the MAC firing controls. The doors effortlessly slid shut and they felt the machine draw them downwards, into the very depths of the defense station.

Andrew swallowed. "Guys, whatever it is on the other side of these doors, lets give them hell."

Understanding the humbling circumstances they might be facing, Emmanuel and Henry nodded silently.

The three friends stood quietly for the rest of the journey. With an abrupt halt, the elevator stopped and the doors slid open. They jumped out with their guns poised to attack and leapt to a large supply crate which stood directly in front of them. They stood there silently for a few seconds, listening. Their carefully trained senses, developed from years of hunting, told them that several powerful enemies lay waiting for them.

A deep and commanding voice sounded out. "Remember brothers, our sacrifice guarantees us passage on the great journey!"

None of the marines understood of what was said, but they put it aside and quickly dispersed. Henry remained behind the crate and Emmanuel raced behind another resting close by. Andrew silently dodged behind several crates and raced towards the left side of the chamber. Just as he cleared the last crate, his steel tipped toe smacked the top of the metal crate. The sound was muffled by the leather of the boot, but it was loud enough.

The same voice rose in warning, "I heard something. Be ready for attack."

_The hell you did, _thought Henry. After receiving nods from his two friends, he and Emmanuel arched their bodies between the gap of the two crates and fired their battle rifles directly upon the head of a blue elite. The accurate and precise shots quickly eliminated the elite's shielding and its head disintegrated from the bullets.

While his two friends fought, Andrew crouched forward and saw the fallen body of another marine. Besides the burnt corpse lay four fragmentation grenades and he quickly picked them up. Drawn by the gun fire at the right side of the chamber, Andrew noticed the four remaining elites, two blue, one red, and one white, stood at guard behind several crates and fired bursts of plasma in return.

Reloading their weapons, Henry and Emmanuel turned and caught the other blue elite out in the open. They proceeded to make a mess of him similar to his bloodied comrade. As quickly as they fired, they hid back behind the crates and reloaded just as another stream of plasma raced by.

Andrew watched as the headless corpse of the second elite fell. Realizing that they were fighting against well trained marines, one of the red elites attempted to sneak around by Andrew and flank them. However, the young marine caught on of the elite's plan quickly and pulled the pins on two of his grenades. Tossing them under the feet of the unsuspecting elite, he ducked behind the crate. The sound of an enraged growl sounded before the two grenades detonated. The splatter of dark blood decorated the walls around Andrew.

The two remaining elites pressed their bodies tightly against their defensive objects and nervously attempted to devise a plan. Perfecting his arc, Andrew lobbed his two remaining grenades onto the top of the crate concealing the remaining blue elite. The grenades bounced and dropped in front of the elite. It watched in disbelief and horror as the two explosives fell next to his face. The instinctive reflex to run came too late and the two grenades made quick work of its shielding and body. All that remained was the white elite.

Its chest heaved in rage and shock. Humans were outsmarting him? Outrageous! One of the best trained elites of his entire division, it was unthinkable that such vile creatures caused hints of fear to creep through his blood. However, the temporary feeling of fear was washed away with a surge of rage and hate. He jumped out into the open and roared, "Come out, vile filth, and meet your demise!"

Henry and Emmanuel poked their torsos out from behind the crates and fired onto the powerful overshields. As Henry emptied his cartridge, one of the plasma bolts struck him in his shoulder. He fell back in pain and grimaced as he watched his flesh burn. The battle rifle he was wielding fell to the floor with a clatter.

Emmanuel looked at his friend with sadness and hatred as he watched Henry suffer. The marine quickly reloaded his battle rifle and opened fire again on the white elite. Another full clip of ammo was emptied on the elite yet its overshields still protected it. Emmanuel ducked behind the crate just as a stream of plasma raced by, nearly melting his face.

He cursed at the strength of the elite while he reloaded his last cartridge.

Suddenly, however, the white elite dropped his plasma rifle and the hiss of superheated plasma rushed to life in his energy sword. "Enough of this cowardly hiding. Now I shall smite you down."

The sounds of heavy footsteps approached. Emmanuel managed to punch in his last clip just as the elite rounded the corner of the crates. Standing over eight feet tall, the dwarfed marine fell back a few steps. Emmanuel was overcome with fear and he dropped his battle rifle. The elite clapped its mandibles together in amusement and prepared to swing a fatal blow. However, its shielding once again roared to life. Struggling to overcome the pain, Henry grabbed his fallen rifle and began to fire on the elite using his healthy arm. The white elite staggered to its left, caught off-balance by the momentum of the bullets hitting its backside.

The very last burst of ammo from Henry's rifle managed to eliminate the remaining shell of the elites shielding, but he lacked the firepower to make the kill. The white armored elite regained control

of its body and kicked the empty rifle from Henry's hands.

"Now you shall both die. May the universe be cleansed of your filth."

The elite raised its sword in the air and prepared to swipe it across the body of Henry. The marine instinctively covered his face, knowing that the attempt of protection was futile. Just as the sword began to fall, Andrew dove across the other side of the room. He saw the elite begin its deadly strike and he saw the small hole of the metal barrier separating his rifle and the back of the elite's unprotected head. Andrew took a deep breath, focused with all his might, and pulled the trigger.

Henry heard the gurgled muffle escape from the elite's mouth and felt something warm and wet fall on him. The sound of a large body falling sounded to his side and he uncovered his armors to see a small hole cut clean through the elite's head. Andrew's burst rang true and the elite lay dead and motionless.

Emmanuel couldn't believe what happened, but he quickly ran over to Henry to tend his wound. Andrew, in the meantime, ran over to the front of the chamber to make sure all the enemies were dead. The corpses of elites greeted his eyes but what drew his attention was the large, spiky body that lay in nearest the front.

As he walked up to the strange object, a red light began to flash on top of it and a faint hum began to crescendo. Andrew scratched his head for a moment in wonder, but then it hit him. All his energy was sapped from his body as he came to the realization of that the elites were protecting.

He cleared his dry throat and with a shaky voice said, "Guys, what was it that we promised each other back in boot camp?"

Emmanuel and Henry instantly knew the answer and Emmanuel responded. "We agreed that in this life and in the next, our brotherhood would remain true. Why do you ask?"

A tear fell down Andrew's cheek and with the hint of a very small sob he replied, "Because I think our time here has come to an end."

Authors Notes: This is my one shot. I'm writing this now instead of getting any sleep, but hey, my decision, and I like what I choose to do. As for this story, I had an idea of a band of marines with a tight bond and wanted to show that the very essence of brotherhood is an extremely powerful force. Read, drop a review, do the hookey-pokie, whatever, but I hope you enjoy!

End
file.